

- Hall, Hudson Valley Growers to Discuss Proposed Farm Bill Tomorrow, Friday July 20th in Pine Island -

Hall Calls on House Agriculture Committee to Provide:

- More Support for Fruit and Vegetable Crops***
- Energy Independence Through More Home-grown Biofuels***
- More Money to Protect Farmland in Production***

Washington, DC - As the House Agriculture Committee meets this week to consider the 2007 Farm Bill, U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) has called on the House Agriculture Committee to prioritize key measures that would benefit Hudson Valley farmers.

"This Farm Bill will set the course of our nation's agricultural policy for at least the next five years," said Hall in a letter to Committee Chairman Colin Peterson. "It will have a dramatic impact on America's economic prosperity, nutrition, balance of trade, sources of energy, and the environment."

"In order to seize on the opportunities presented by this bill, I believe that Congress must craft legislation grounded in the principles of regional equity, augmented support for specialty crops, increased funding for conservation programs, an extension or improvement upon the MILC program, and a commitment to America's energy future," wrote Hall.

Hall will meet with Hudson Valley farmers tomorrow in Pine Island to discuss their priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill before the bill goes to the full House for a vote in late July.

Hall called on the Agriculture Committee to pay special attention to improving crop insurance and disaster aid a priority, something of particular concern to Hudson Valley growers who have suffered from a series of weather-related crop failures over the last decade. Hall requested that the farm bill include an increase in the amount of risk eligible for crop insurance coverage and for expanded insurance programs that would include revenue and cost of production insurance. Three "50-year" storms have hit the Hudson Valley in the past three years, causing significant damage to crops.

"Environmental considerations and weather are among the most important factors in determining the success or failure of a crop, and are largely beyond the control of individual farmers," said Hall. "In order for farms to remain viable in years when nature is not cooperative, it is necessary to make sure that there are adequate safety-net programs in place that are truly responsive to the needs of all farmers."

Hall also called on the Agriculture Committee to strengthen vital federal conservation programs, including the Farm and Ranchland Protection program that is designed to help keep farmland used for agriculture instead of being sold for development. In addition, Hall expressed his support for the implementation of a Conservation on Muck Soils (COMS) program to meet the specific needs of muckland soil crops such as the onions grown in Orange County. The program would reward anti-erosion and cover crop practices while addressing shortcomings under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to help encourage ongoing production.

"Programs designed to further farmland protection are particularly important in the Hudson Valley, where population pressures and rising property values resulting from proximity to New York City have placed a tremendous strain on the farming community," said Hall. "Financial support from federal conservation programs is a key to ensuring that farmers in New York and the rest of the nation can continue to actively work and protect their land."

Hall requested that the Committee improve several programs to help specialty crop growers and dairy farmers, including:

- Increased and specifically dedicated funding for research, marketing, and promotion of specialty crops.
- An extension of the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program with amendments to the program that would reestablish a payment schedule of 45% of the difference between \$16.94 and the Class I milk price per hundredweight in Boston and increase the cap on covered production to 4,800,000 pounds.
- Increased funding for research into mechanized harvesting and handling techniques.
- Increased funding and permanent allocation for the Specialty Crop Block Grant.
- Hall is also pushing for the Farm Bill to reflect America's current need for energy independence. He asked that the Agriculture Committee:
 - Reauthorize the CCC Bioenergy Program and Bio-based Products Procurement Program with reforms that will emphasize soy and cellulosic feed stocks, implement a market development program, and identify feedstocks as biobased products.
 - Expand support for purchasing renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements, including such programs as 9006 methane digesters, solar, windmills, and others to reduce energy costs for farmers.
 - Address global climate change, specifically the topics of carbon sequestration, the effects of temperature change on crop production, pest production, and ways to mitigate negative effects of global climate change through management of tropical and temperate forests.

"America's continuing dependence on fossil fuels and imported oil continues to create a tremendous drag on our economy, threatens our national security, and damage our environment and public health," said Hall. "Our nation's farms can make a major contribution to reversing all of these trends by helping to meet our fuel and energy needs through renewable sources."